directly it shows signs of dying. I was told that they will follow a sick donkey for miles, circling lazily in the air and greedily awaiting the moment when the animal will totter to its knees and slowly expire.

A patriarchal-looking Arab in a brown silk *abbas* came towards us and greeted the Khan Sahib with affection. He told us that he belonged to the retinue of the Sheikh Raschid, who was camping in the hills nearby. Apparently the sheikh was on a hunting expedition and had shot several gazelle and *houbari*, the lesser bustard. We declined his invitation to take coffee with the sheikh, as this would have meant a delay of at least an hour, and time was pressing; so he gave us very exact instructions for finding the road to Mahrid. This meant crossing a wadhi, where the ground was still soggy and uncertain for heavy vehicles, but with luck and good driving we crossed it without mishap. A grubby Arab boy appeared from behind a neam tree and, jumping on our running board, insisted on showing us the way; we did not begrudge him the lift and, as it transpired, he really was helpful.

The way meandered through a field of perfumed clover, a small-leaved variety with tiny yellow flowers. The scent was reminiscent of mimosa and was so strong as to be almost overwhelming. Hundreds of bees, attracted by the smell, filled the still air with their murmuring. The Arabs collect large quantities of honey from this district, and it is all made from the scented clover-pollen. The mountains now loomed titanically above us, grim and lowering, and ten miles to the west we could see the spires and towers of Ras-al-Khaimah reflected in the clear blue waters of the creek.

At the foot of the hills the softer green of the grass was shaded by dark avenues of neam trees, plantations of date palms, and the summer gardens of the wealthier residents. We had eight miles to go before we reached Mahrid, and it was already noon. We felt hungry and thirsty, and longed for the cool veranda of the Khan Sahib's house, with prospects of sherbet, *haloua* and cheese. At that moment—such is the perversity of life—our truck gave a convulsive cough and refused to budge further. A quick inspection by our driver revealed that we had run out of petrol.

No course was open to us other than to alight from the overheated vehicle, light pipes or cigarettes, and sit down to talk the situation over. We had a faint inkling of how the Army at Tobruk and Marble Arch must have felt in a similar predicament, only with Messerschmitts and Junkers zooming overhead, and how they

[Near Mahrid -- Analyst]